

ROBERT PECKHAM, WJU Hall of Fame - 2000

A FOUNDING FATHER OF UGA LEGAL AID CLINIC MOURNED

Col. Robert Peckham was mentor and teacher to a generation of law students

By Greg Land, Staff Reporter, Fulton County (Georgia) Daily Report

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COL. ROBERT D. PECKHAM, who shaped a generation of public defenders as director of the University of Georgia School of Law's Legal Aid and Defender Society, was fondly remembered by those who knew him as a lawyer, teacher, soldier, musician and raconteur following his passing July 19, 2006 at the age of 81.

Peckham's route to UGA was a circuitous one, but once he arrived he found a welcoming home. Originally from Iowa, he attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and received his commission in 1947, serving in Japan and Korea, where he was wounded-before being assigned to the judge advocate general's office in 1952. He earned his law degree from Harvard Law School in 1955, and spent several years as a military lawyer in Italy before coming back to teach law at West Point.

Peckham returned to Korea as a deputy judge advocate in 1963-64, then taught at the Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Va., until retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1968. He joined UGA's law school as a professor in 1968, taking the helm of the one-year-old legal aid program while teaching military law and criminal trial practice. "That was before the day of public defender being a recognized career field," said John W. Timmons Jr. of Athens' Timmons Warnes & Anderson, who was Peckham's student and a Legal Aid Society member at UGA, later returning to work as a public defender under Peckham. "In those days, we had two lawyers and a bunch of third-year law students handling criminal and civil cases," recalled Timmons, who joined the bar in 1970. "We handled criminal cases, and also had a civil section," handling 600 to 700 in each category annually, he said.

"And we did pretty well, too," he added. "Bob was never down, never said a discouraging word, just like the song," recalled Timmons. "If things were going really bad, he used to say, 'Sometimes there's nothing to do but go back to the barracks and kick your footlocker.' He was one of two or three men who most influenced me as a lawyer, and he had a lot of influence on a lot of defenders who came through that program."

Today, the program, known as the Legal Aid Clinic, has 13 lawyers, a full-time support staff and generally handles criminal cases. Clarke County public defender Thomas J. Killeen, who also came through the program before being hired to work in it, recalled Peckham as "a true original." "He was not only the father of indigent defense in Athens," said Killeen, "but as an educator, he was also in the forefront of what you might call 'clinical education,' the idea that UGA law school would be putting out much better students if they had real-world experience. That's a well-accepted principle now, but it wasn't then."

Killeen and Timmons also credit Peckham with helping secure the funding to begin the Prisoner Legal Counseling Project that provided legal counsel for inmates in prisons around the state from 1972 to 1996.

"He was also one of the fiercest cross-examiners I've ever encountered," said Killeen, who said Peckham would take to the courtroom himself for particularly complex cases. Outside the legal world, Peckham played the trombone and was a founding member of the Classic City Band, a volunteer group of enthusiasts specializing in marches, pop and show tunes that began playing together in 1976 and continues to perform. He was also a board member of Windjammers Unlimited, a circus music preservation society whose convention he was attending in Des Moines, Iowa, at the time of his death.

But his greatest impact was as mentor and exemplar to the young lawyers who came to learn from him. "Bob Peckham was, for several generations of UGA law students, the example of what a lawyer should be," said former Gov. Roy E. Barnes, who came through the Legal Aid Society program while earning his law degree in 1972. "For many of us who have dedicated our professional careers to being public defenders, Col. Peckham will always be the lawyer that we strive to be," said Georgia Public Defender Standards Council Director B. Michael Mears. "His legacy will continue to reach far beyond the arches at UGA. He is the perfect example of the difference a teacher can make in the lives of his students."

Robert D. Peckham was Windjammer Member #121. He served as editor of Windjammers Unlimited's publication, Circus Fanfare, from 1993 until his death in 2006. Bob first served as a Windjammers Trustee in 1977 and was President 1987-1991. For his service to the organization, he was inducted into the Windjammers Hall of Fame in 2000.

O.S. AL FINE

By Circus Fanfare Editor, April Zlnk

The “all out and over” was sounded at the 2006 Des Moines Summer Meet for more than just the meet. At a break between conductors at Wednesday morning’s rehearsal, Windjammer president, Don Albright announced to the band that Bob Peckham had died in his room. While we were immediately shocked, we all knew that Bob would have wanted the meet to continue as planned.

Past-president, Bill Roosa assured us at the banquet and again at our concert, that he was confident Bob had safely arrived in heaven. Bill had witnessed a flying hawk while driving. Just as a Native American legend foretold-- with the passing of a great man, so too, would a hawk fly to indicate the end of a great man’s journey.

It is an old circus tradition to play *Auld Lang Syne* as the final piece at the end of the season. It is no coincidence that bandleader Karl King wrote a march, *Auld Lang Syne*, penning the final strain with the familiar New Year’s Eve melody. The Windjammers concert band played the final strain of this march as a tribute to Bob Peckham. Not to leave the concert with a heavy heart, the band ripped into the final number on the program, Barnum and Bailey’s Favorite with the full force and spirit of a traditional circus band.

The final whistle has been blown, and the last chord still hangs heavy in the air, there is but one thing to say: “May all your days be circus days!”

Bill dedicated the playing of *Auld Lang Syne* to Colonel Peckham at the Windjammers' concert.

